

Tropes of Love, Representations of Pain, and Coping Strategies in Chimeka Garricks's *A Broken People's Playlist*

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Abstract

This study examines the interlocking strands of love tropes, the depiction of pain, and adaptive mechanisms in Chimeka Garricks's *A Broken People's Playlist*, adopting Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic literary theory in its analysis. Paying close attention to the concepts of personality structure (id, ego, and superego) and defence mechanism as its conceptual frameworks, the paper identifies such tropes of love as the star-crossed lovers, the love triangle, and the second chance romance; highlights rationalisation, sublimation, and displacement as some of the coping mechanisms used by characters to deal with pain, whether physical or psychogenic. It is discovered that not only are the manifestations of pain diverse but there also are no standard coping strategies as each character consigns to themselves the most effective mechanism(s). It is further revealed that the author mostly writes about love and pain in a way that guarantees each other. Therefore, Garricks challenges the romanticised notion of love as a purely blissful state, revealing instead its complex reality where love and pain are intertwined like the warp and weft of a single fabric, the recto and verso of one page, or the dual sides of the same coin, even in the most genuine expressions of affection.

Keywords: Coping Strategies, Defence Mechanisms, Emotions, Freud, Personality Structure

1. Introduction

The critical discourse surrounding literature and history emphasises their interconnectedness, acknowledging that even the most imaginative narratives are rooted in and shaped by historical realities. The idea of literature as an art form that reflects historical verities logically leads to questions about the place of seemingly non-historical or purely imaginative elements within literary works. That is, if literature is so closely tied to historical context, how do we account for the presence of fantasy, mythology, abstract concepts, or purely emotional explorations that do not appear to have direct historical referents? This perspective may lead one to wonder if such elements are somehow less 'valid' or less important in understanding a work's meaning. Extolling the quintessence of history to the relevance of a writer, Ogwude (1998, p.27) submits:

Since the relevance of the writer rests primarily on his demonstration of an awareness of the public events around him.... The need for relevance in the enterprise of literary production will compel the literary artist to be aware of history. Therefore, there is a sense in which most creative works of art, if not all, can be said to be historical.

This position prompts the consideration of whether literature's value lies solely in its capacity to represent or comment on historical events since Ogwude argues that history is a vital component in the creative process. This perspective positions history not only as a backdrop but as a force that informs and inspires literary creation.

But, how historical is the triadic node of the tropes of love, representations of pain, and coping strategies as represented in such literary texts as Chimeka Garricks's *A Broken People's Playlist*? It is noteworthy that history in Ogwude's submission does not necessarily occlude literary texts that are based on realistic events and not real events. In this regard, literary texts that engage with the discourse on the primary motifs analysed in this paper are not exempted from her avowal since they are a part of human history. At the heart of the inseparability of

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literature and reality lies the human experience, one that does not shut out love and pain. These universal feelings serve as both subject matter and lens through which writers replicate reality in creative compositions. Nonetheless, even if Ogwude's historical stance were to disqualify the tripod of love, pain, and healing strategies on the basis that history, in the strictest sense, thrives on what has happened and not what can happen, critics who consider reality to be a core component of literature have accommodated it. As Beardsley (1958, p.436) argues:

To decide with what attitudes and expectations aesthetic objects are best approached ... we have to ask ... whether or in what way they connect with reality, that is with the rest of the world in which they exist. This problem is most acute in literature, for by their nature literary works seem to have an essential and unavoidable reference to, and concern with, reality.

Beardsley's assertion creates a connection between literature and reality, suggesting that understanding how to approach literary works requires considering their relationship to the world beyond the text.

From Beardsley's standpoint, reality is an almost indispensable part of literature, and de Man (1982, p.11) delineates its relatedness to fiction: 'Literature is fiction not because it somehow refuses to acknowledge "reality," but because it is not *a priori* certain that language functions according to principles which are those, or which are like those, of the phenomenal world'. De Man subverts the notion that what defines a fictional text is that it simply invents things and ignores reality but that the way language works in literature does not necessarily have a perfect one-to-one correspondence with how things function in the real world. Language in literature can be used creatively, metaphorically, and symbolically, creating a kind of reality that might not directly mirror the physical world. This informs why authors, while projecting reality in their narratives, are not spellbound to specific objective modes of narration but are open to a wide gamut of genres/narrative modes such as realism, socialist realism, social realism, naturalism, and magical realism, among others.

Discourse on history and reality within the context of literature may appear tangential to this study because the node of love, pain, and coping strategies is not as historical as one would conceive, say, the Nigerian Civil War, but it is a necessary backdrop to assess how much such feelings as love and pain fit within this frame. This is concretised in Muller-Wood's (2014, p.140) questions on the representation of emotions in literature: 'But how *unrepresentable* are emotions really? And even if they are *unrepresentable*, does this inevitably mean that emotions cannot be made tangible in literary texts in other ways?' Muller-Wood acknowledges the argument that emotions are subjective and elusive, making them difficult to accurately convey through language. However, she challenges the notion that this inherent difficulty precludes the possibility of representing emotions in literature altogether. The novelty of the interrogation of feelings and emotions in literary criticism is acknowledged by Knaller (2017:18) who avers that:

In the wake of more and more diverse and complex research in neuro- and cognitive science, psychology, biology, linguistics and philosophy, literary criticism has become increasingly interested in a subject which literature itself has, in fact, ever since been concerned with emotions and feelings. On the level of text the actions of literary characters have always been motivated by emotions such as guilt, hatred, love, jealousy and fear. To identify these fictional emotions, which are informed by the life-world and its practices, is an important aspect of literary understanding.

Knaller's submission is proof of the evolving nature of literary criticism, one that is characterised by the emergence of a renewed focus on emotions and feelings. Traditionally, literary analysis has often prioritised elements like plot, character, and theme in a way that did not put the study of emotions on the same level. These elements remain crucial, undoubtedly, but the inclusion of emotions as primary objects of study has signalled a change in the world of literary criticism.

The impetus for this development can be traced to advancements in fields such as those identified by Knaller, which have engendered the understanding of human emotions. The models stirred by these disciplines from the realm of human emotion have fortified the critical toolkit of literary scholars for the evaluation of how emotions are experienced, processed, and communicated within texts. The study of emotions in criticism lodges the examination of tropes and metaphors across genres, including those of love, pain, and coping mechanisms, the foci of this critique. This is verified by Lyytikainen (2017, p.252) who insists that:

The psychological analysis of emotions in literary texts has many functions, and philosophical conceptions of emotions are illustrated in literary texts. Tropes, embedded stories and discourses and many other elements are brought in. All in all, the possibilities are as varied as in real life. As texts, literary texts are unique precisely because they dramatize whole worlds and bring in a full gallery of fictional agents with their minds capes that often affect us profoundly.

Lyytikäinen underscores the variegated nature of analysing emotions in literary texts, emphasising the role of tropes in exhuming the psychological depths of characters. These elements are not just stylistic devices as they are integral to understanding the emotional core of a literary work, engaging tropes as channels for exploring emotions.

Literature makes provisions for a concentrated and dramatised exploration of the human psyche, and Lyytikäinen's perspective implies that the study of emotions in literature is an expansive field that involves a careful examination of various textual elements to unravel the construction, representation, and experience of emotions within the literary world. She reemphasises the role of tropes and metaphors in this area with the conviction that: 'Literary subjects present judgements and "information" relating to emotions and use comparisons and metaphors or other tropes (involving conceptual blending and including affective trope-worlds)' (Lyytikäinen, p.254). Therefore, literature actively constructs and presents human knowledge about emotions, rather than only reflecting pre-existing emotional states, and the use of comparisons, metaphors, and other tropes aids this process. Affective trope-worlds, according to Lyytikäinen, invite readers to experience emotions and develop their emotional understanding through engagement with the text. The interrogation of love and pain as feelings in literature is not the only underexplored aspect in literary criticism as Roy (2022, p.246) asserts that 'Healing is [also] one of the more underemphasized aspects of medical studies', stressing the fact that 'one of the most enduring aspects of disease-centric fiction is the way it represents healing'.

This assertion, in Roy's view, is not an attempt to deny the studies of ancient Western classical writers like Homer who 'have given trauma and sickness their due place, and later Chaucer, Shakespeare, Boccaccio, Dante and even Eliot, Sartre, Camus, Kafka have spoken about trauma and illness with their due importance' (p.246). These scholars focused more on the illness than the strategies deployed by characters to heal. From the point of view of the author, scholars have also examined how writing fiction itself is a healing strategy. Freud, for Ihueze (2019), forges a connection between artistic expression and the human psyche where creative endeavours provide a leeway for individuals to find a substitute gratification for infantile or forbidden wishes that society often suppresses, in alliance with the notion of writing as a cathartic process. Within this context, since writing can be a healing strategy for the writer, it then justifies the inclusion of coping strategies deployed by characters to deal with the physical, emotional, and psychogenic pains they feel. In fact, not only does Garricks load his text with these strategies, but the text itself is a product of a coping strategy. The author admits that not being able to write for years irrespective of how hard he tried 'messed with ... [his] mind' (2020, p.158). His inability to write fetched him pain, but he still found a way to sublimate this pain in writing with the help of "'Music' and other songs playing in the background, whispering in ... [his] ear, egging ... [him] on' (p.158).

The title of Garricks's collection of short stories allows a reader to discern its content as one steeped in emotional and psychological vulnerability and pain. A writer, according to Ihueze (2019, p.4), is distinguished from a neurotic in the sense that where the neurotic, overwhelmed by reality, succumbs to chaos and is unable to forge a coherent escape, the artist possesses the transformative power to sublimate and neutralise internal conflict, rendering it comprehensible to others through writing. Through the alchemy of sublimation, Garricks transmutes his anger and sadness into raw material of fiction, setting up a triad of love, pain, and coping mechanisms — the thematic triangle which this paper examines using *A Broken People's Playlist*.

2. Theoretical Framework

Psychoanalytic literary theory provides the analytical lens through which this essay explores the emotional depths of Garricks's *A Broken People's Playlist*. This theory primarily transposes the theoretical postulations of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, and other psychoanalysts to literary criticism for the examination of mental processes that unravel the minds of characters to ascertain why they behave the way they do, as well as the mind of the author to understand his/her motivations. The word 'psychoanalysis' was first introduced by Freud in his essay titled 'Heredity and Etiology of Neuroses' ('L'hérédité et l'étiologie des névroses'), written and published in French in 1896 (Roudinesco and Plon, 1998). Though rooted in the broader field of psychoanalysis, this paper hones its analytical focus specifically on the concepts of personality structure (id, ego, and superego) and defence mechanisms. Guerin et al. (2010, p.90) note that of all the three parts of the human psyche, it is the ego that is closest to the human consciousness, for it mediates the inner self and the outer world, which is why it remains subject to the reality principle: 'In figurative terms, we might say that the id would make us behave like angels (or, worse, creatures of social conformity), and it remains for the ego to keep us healthy human beings by maintaining a balance between these opposing forces'. While the id might impulsively strive for unrealistic ideals or, conversely, yield to base desires and social conformity, the ego's role is crucial in maintaining a balanced and healthy human existence.

It is the ego's responsibility to find realistic and acceptable ways to fulfil needs and desires while adhering to social norms and moral principles. Without this balance, an individual risks being either overwhelmed by their

impulses or excessively constrained by their conscience. This is made lucid in Freud's explication of what the ego does when he averred:

The functional importance of the ego is manifested in the fact that normally control over the approaches to motility devolves upon it. Thus in its relation to the id it is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider seeks to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces (1923, p.30).

The analogy illustrates the ego's relationship with the id where the latter represents primal instincts and desires, possessing a raw, untamed energy. The ego, like the rider, must manage and direct this energy. That Freud associates the ego with borrowed forces is understood as the influence of the external world, social norms, learned behaviours, and other resources that help the ego to manage the id's impulses the way it should. Simply put, 'The ego is what we call reason or sanity, in contrast to the id which contains passion' (Freud, 1923, p.30). The ego does not only operate when one is conscious but also continues in one's dream because 'Every dream is absolutely egotistical; in every dream the beloved ego appears, even though it may be in a disguised form' (Freud, 1913, p.227). The ego, therefore, does not simply suppress the id but rather channels its energy in a way that is both safe and appropriate within a given context.

The third part of the human psyche, the superego, 'is less closely connected with consciousness than the rest' (Freud, 1923, p.35). This implies that a bulk of the superego, what Freud also calls the ego-ideal, resides in the unconscious. For Bressler (2010, p.127), the superego:

...acts like an internal censor, causing us to make moral judgments in light of social pressures. In contrast to the id, the superego operates according to the morality principle and serves primarily to protect society and us from the id. Representing all of society's moral restrictions, the superego serves as a filtering agent, suppressing the desires and instincts forbidden by society and thrusting them back into the unconscious.

In line with Bressler's description, the superego is an internal moral compass, acting as a judge of thoughts and actions based on societal norms and expectations. Unlike the id which is driven by primal desires and seeks immediate gratification, the superego operates on a principle of morality. Its primary function is to safeguard both society and the individual from the potentially destructive impulses of the id. The superego embodies moral constraints and rules imposed by society, acting as a filter that suppresses unacceptable desires and instincts, pushing them out of conscious awareness and back into the unconscious realm.

Beyond the personality structure are defence mechanisms which, in themselves, cannot be divorced from the former because the latter is a function of the ego, the second part of Freud's tripartite structure of the psyche. According to Baumeister et al. (1998, p.1082), Freud's work on defence mechanism 'focused on how the ego defended itself against internal events, specifically, impulses that were regarded by the ego as unacceptable'. Freud wrote that the symptoms of neuroses can arise 'through the psychological mechanism of (unconscious) defence that is, in an attempt to repress an incompatible idea which has come into distressing opposition to the patient's ego' (Freud, 1962, p.162). Defences are activated when an individual tries to repress a thought or idea that creates internal conflict and causes distress to their sense of self. Freud (1960) identified humour, distortion, displacement, repression, suppression, fantasy, and isolation as the types of defence mechanisms. Baumeister et al. (1998, p.1084), however, identify reaction formation, projection, displacement, undoing, isolation, sublimation, and denial as the types. Some of these mechanisms, alongside insights drawn from the personality structure, are used in the literary intellection of Garricks's collection of short stories.

3.The Emotional Depth of Garricks's *A Broken People's Playlist*

Garricks's collection of short stories begins with love. In the first sentence of the first story — 'Lost Stars' — the narrator says: 'They will ask me when I first knew I was in love with you. I will sigh and say I don't know' (p.8). The classic trope of love at first sight appears to be at play here because Sira's affection for Kaodini, her lover, may have taken root on their first day. As the instinctual part of the psyche operates outside of conscious awareness, the dominance of the id during Sira's opening introspection is seen in her inability to pinpoint a specific moment of falling in love. This introduction ushers in the motif of love in the first story which, in turn, lays the groundwork for the subsequent stories. Love stories are mostly woven with some level of playful, childlike flavour between the lovers, and when Sira tells Kaodini to visit her parents, the following conversation ensues: "Beg me first." "You'll die of old age if you're waiting for me to beg." You sigh and get back on the motorcycle. We stare at each other till I say, "OK. You win. Abeg now" (p.9) At this stage, the love between the lovers is still spurting and the trajectory taken by their feelings for each other is on the right course. At this point too, their level of endurance for each other's actions is still high, such that even when one party does not enjoy a particular thing, they endure it for the sake of the other party. Sira affirms this when she says: 'I take sips from your [Kaodini's]

glass. The beer is almost flat, and I don't enjoy it. But I keep sipping' (p.9). Thus, by still sipping from the glass even when she does not enjoy it, Sira maintains the romantic atmosphere of the moment and chooses not to ruin it.

One of the issues subtly raised in the story is the expectations and pressure mounted on lovers by their parents concerning marriage, especially if they are old enough to be a couple. Sira's mother sees a girl on Kaodini's motorbike with him and she despises Kaodini for it since then. Sira, in her defence, says: 'After Nua's wedding, I'd be the only one among the four sisters in my family who wasn't married. And at thirty-five, I am the oldest. It was a prayer point for my mother, and the start point for our many battles. I sip more beer. "I'm sorry. That's how she is" ' (p.9). Here, she employs rationalisation as a psychological defence, constructing a narrative of normalcy to justify her mother's actions, effectively convincing herself of the absence of wrongdoing and fabricating exculpatory tales. Sira's excuse is convenient enough to compel Kaodini into seeing reasons with Sira's mother — her mother expects Kaodini to be serious with Sira, not just because she is the eldest daughter but because she would be the only one left after Nua, and at the age of thirty-five. Sira understands the place of women without children in a patriarchal society. This is captured by Julie in Onyemelukwe-Onuobia's *Son of the House*: 'My mother had never really said that, never really said anything beyond the fact that a woman must have children to be called a woman' (2019, p.192).

Sira and Kaodini's love is laced with jealousy as indicated in their interaction: "Wait! You're jealous?" "No!" I hiss. "You wish." Your smile says you don't believe me. I point at you. "It's you who's jealous." "Me? Jealous? Of who? Femi?" "Yes. You've always been jealous of Femi" (p.10). The lovers use denial as a defence mechanism to refute the reality that they are jealous because they find it too uncomfortable to be admitted. Garricks explores different forms of love in the short stories, erotic love inclusive. Sira says that 'Thursday was kisses, bites, sweat, thrusts and screams — a frenzied mauling because there was no tomorrow. Liquid electric, it coursed through every cell, jolted my body alive, but felt good for my spirit like a homecoming' (p.14). The author acknowledges the duality of sex in modern relationships: a genuine expression of love for some, a manipulative tactic for others who feign affection. This is reified in one of the stories where an unnamed character is told that he has impregnated his lover: 'She had expected you to be happy about it, because, as she reminded you, you always said you love her. You remember it differently. Yes, you said you love her, but you only said it in the middle of sex, and in your book, that didn't count' (p.87). For this reason, some claim they love just so they can attain and/or maintain their ultimate goal of having sexual intercourse with the other party.

The narrator is not ignorant of the commercialisation of love by some people. The all-encompassing attribute of love usually attributed to relationships is denied by Sira who asserts that there is more to relationships than love: 'They will ask me why I said no. And I will sigh and say exactly what I told you — because I wasn't a child anymore, and because I knew love alone was never enough in this life' (p.16). While some say that love conquers everything, love has been reduced to just one virtue or component prerequisite in relationships. Within this frame, Sira considers ignorance of this claim as a mark of naivety:

I told you that I didn't want to give up my life and move back to Port Harcourt, that I would eventually resent you if I did. I told you that I wouldn't forgive myself if you gave up your life and all you'd worked hard for, for me. You said we would work out something. I told you not to be naïve (p.16).

Consequently, the presence of love between Sira and Kaodini does not ensure other things and as such, each party has to remain in their domain and not bud the thought of marriage, according to Sira. The tropes of love evinced in the stories acknowledge the disproportionate level of love between people — no two people can love each other on the same level. Kaodini is more emotionally invested and he promises to do anything to make the marriage work: 'Sira, I was serious when I said we can make this work. I'm willing to do what it takes' (p.18). To make undeniable the level of emotional investment in the text, Garricks opens and closes his stories with the proclamation of love — the last sentence in *A Broken People's Playlist* is: 'To paraphrase a wise man — we should talk less about death and make love more' (157).

Love may be a sweet feeling, but Garricks does not ignore the intense pain that follows unrequited love or when one loses his/her beloved. In fact, Wobia, in another story, 'Beautiful War', believes that 'Love is shit' (p.99). The emotional laceration inflicted by such situations can be so severe as to evoke a longing for a prelapsarian state, a world untouched by the potential agonies of love. The pain depicted by Garricks stretches from the physical to the emotional and psychogenic. In Sira's case, for instance, she says that 'Looking back, I wish I had bottled the peace of that moment and carried it through my life' (p.12). The pain that trailed the death of her lover had altered her life to a point where it plummeted, their love story now assuming the trope of star-crossed lovers. While in a relationship with Victor, news is carried that Sira is in love with Kaodini and Victor questions Sira about the truthfulness of the news. She reports:

He said that I was “perambulating” around D/Line with you and embarrassing him. I said he was overreacting. I even apologized. Then he slapped me. I was used to my father beating my mother. He did it almost with a nonchalance that came from regular practice and confidence in her perpetual surrender. But I am not my mother. I slapped Victor — so hard, my wrist almost snapped and the pain volted up my arm (p.11).

Sira’s apology suggests the ego at work which attempts to mediate social expectations and maintain a sense of equilibrium and the contrast between appeasement and retaliation reveals the internal conflict between her ego and id. Although she is not arcane to the physical abuse that her mother is subjected to by her father, Sira does not allow these painful experiences to sink into her unconscious as a normal occurrence. She, at once, senses the abnormality in Victor’s action and slaps him back. The trope of the love triangle is hinted at here as there is a romantic rivalry between two characters because of a third.

Before Kaodini’s death, Sira suffers from unrequited love. Learning that the boy she loves is in love with another girl makes her weep bitterly. In her attempt to cope with the difficult situation and evade the sad reality, she recoils to Victor whom she no longer loves, the trope of second chance romance. She admits that she ‘blanked him [Victor] until the day someone told me about Osa, your then girlfriend. I didn’t tell you that I cried, snuck to Victor’s house, took off my clothes mechanically and lay, zombied, on his bed (p.12). Tears serve as the predominant conduit for the expression of pain throughout the novel, employed by characters across the spectrum of age and gender—from the young to the old, male and female—as a means of catharsis for emotional, physical, and psychological suffering. In Kaodini’s case, he stopped smiling when his father died (p.10). Characters who do not cry despite being in pain seem to act weirdly in uncomfortable or grave situations because they deprive themselves of ‘some temporary relief from the pain’ (p.86) which tears offer.

An unnamed character in the short story, ‘I’d Die Without You’, does not cry after losing his father. Even at the time of losing his daughter, he still does not cry despite wanting to. Unable to release the burden of his pain, he plunges into chaos as reported by the narrator:

You also talked to her about random things — about her clothes which your wife had ordered from the US, and her room which was just painted pink on Saturday. You touched her hair and told her you’d dreamed she’d have your hair, so you could both rock Afros and take selfies. You touched her cold cheeks. You called her name. Adesuwa. You did not pray (p.86).

All these, he says to his dead daughter as though she were alive — his dead daughter which he had put in a shoebox. He finally lets out the tears at the birth of his son; he cries more than he normally would have wanted to because he has held it for so long: ‘Your first thought is that your rep was being damaged because you were crying in front of the doctor. But within a minute, the damage becomes irreparable. Your face is wet, tears and snot flowing in torrents’ (p.92). The tears cover for all the past experiences which warranted tears but he withheld himself — the death of Comfort, his father, and his daughter.

The pain that streams from being lied against is magnified in the first story, so much that Sira affirms that ‘The beating didn’t hurt as much as the stories which I heard afterwards. I heard I slept with Victor, then with three of his friends, then with you, then with every man who winked at me’ (p.12). These rumours wrought psychological pain on her, much more than the physical pain when she is beaten by Victor for walking with Kaodini. After the death of Kaodini, his mother, before reporting the news to Sira, says, ‘My daughter, I hope you’re sitting down’ (p.19). She understands the devastating force of such news, the shock and pain capable of crushing a person’s spirit, even to death. Although she remains alive after receiving the news, Sira’s life takes a tragic turn. From the happy partner Sira is at a law firm she had always prayed for in Lagos, to a sad recluse who would not eat or bathe for days:

They don’t ask me why I resigned from my job, or why I walk around without my wigs. They don’t ask why I moved back to Port Harcourt, to your apartment, piled your clothes on the bed and lay in them for days [...] They don’t talk about my display at your funeral, where I flung myself at your casket. They don’t ask me why I became an insomniac (p.19).

This shows the ephemerality of time and temporality of feelings because earlier in the story, Sira says she ‘felt the bird’s wings beating furiously where my heart used to be’ (p.18), indicating joy. But within a short period, her whole world comes crashing down. One’s source of happiness can, therefore, simultaneously or subsequently be one’s source of pain.

In *A Broken People’s Playlist*, the three commonest points of view are employed. A reader may associate this multiplicity with the fact that the stories are different, thus, it is normal for the narrators and points of view to be different. However, the distorted timeline and multiple flashbacks in the individual stories show that the multiple narrators and points of view are not necessarily rooted in the different stories narrated by different

characters in the collection, but a conscious attempt by the author to project, even from the plot narration, the brokenness of *A Broken People's Playlist* both as the title of the collection of short stories and also as its thematic thrust. In 'In the City', for instance, the time stamps of the events as they appear in the story are as follows: Tuesday, 7:13 p.m., Tuesday, 11:48 a.m., Tuesday, 7:17 p.m., Tuesday, 11:57 a.m., Tuesday, 7:22 p.m., Tuesday, 12:09 p.m., Tuesday, 7:10 p.m., Tuesday, 7:22 p.m., Tuesday, 7:35 p.m., Tuesday, 9:56 p.m., Wednesday, 12:34 a.m., Wednesday, 12:57 a.m. Thus, like broken pieces, the author scatters the timeline of the plot, allowing the reader to chronologically arrange them while reading.

There are several strategies adopted by the characters in their attempt to cope with the trauma of loss. Some of the strategies are defence mechanisms consciously deployed to deal with difficult and uncomfortable situations. Sira uses regression, the reversal of a person's ego to an earlier stage of psychosexual development as a result of an external problem or internal conflict, whenever she is distressed. She chronicles that Kaodini got her 'fluffy bread; Blue Band margarine; and thick, sweetened Milo. I smiled because you dipped your bread in the cocoa before eating. You convinced me to try it when you joked that it was more than comfort food: it was also one of the secrets to happiness' (p.12). At this early psychosexual stage, Kaodini introduces her to Milo as a recipe for happiness, one she admits when she says: 'You watched me do it, and the expression on my face confirmed you were right' (p.12). Till the end of the short story, even when she ages to over thirty-five years, dipping bread in Milo becomes her go-to meal as a way of regressing to that psychosexual stage of happiness. The use of Milo is not the only index of regression deployed by Sira as a coping strategy. At the death of Kaodini, Sira tries everything possible to deal with the tragic loss of her fiancé, but she fails: 'Gradually, they've learned that I like it when they talk about you. So, they do. They ask questions about everything — about how we met, how I first knew I was in love with you, how often I told you, how you proposed (p.19).

Reliving and relishing her early psychosexual stage with Kaodini is the only way to cope with her loss. While she refuses to eat food, 'for weeks, the only thing ... [she] ... [eats] ... [is] bread dipped in Milo' (p.19). Sira also uses displacement as a defence mechanism. In psychoanalytic theory, displacement is considered to be a coping mechanism in which an individual redirects negative impulses to another target. Battling alopecia at the initial stage is suffocating for Sira but Kaodini offers himself to be used by Sira as a subject of displacement as she reveals: 'You went with me to buy wigs, helped me choose, and deliberately cracked the unfunniest jokes when I cried so I'd get annoyed enough to hit you and stop crying' (p.14). By hitting Kaodini, she displaces her frustrations on him since she cannot go head-to-head with alopecia. At other times, for some characters, people are their source of healing; not tears or defence mechanisms in the constricted classification given by Freud. For instance, in 'Music', when Amezhi moves in with another woman, his first wife cries but is not relieved. Only when she is hugged and held by her son is she relieved. In Kaodini's case, Sira is his source of relief. He goes to her in his darkest days with the hope that she will purge him of whatever feeling he harbours, no matter how horrible it is, as recounted by Sira: 'You knew in your darkest days... when the depression smothered you and you wished for death to end it all — you came to me, to hold you till some light pierced through' (p.13). In all the distressing situations, Kaodini does not resort to crying. It is then evident that each character at some point in their life realises what works for them and constantly uses them.

The ultimate healing strategy highlighted in Garricks's text is sublimation, the same defence mechanism that birthed the collection of short stories. Wade and Tavris (2000, p.478) posit that it occurs when displacement 'serves a higher cultural or socially useful purpose, as in the creation of art or inventions'. In this regard, while displacement is not socially useful, sublimation is. In 'River', the narrator says:

You started writing last night. You wrote all through the night. You poured out everything, the words, the tears. The sheets in the notebooks were smudged, sodden. It was illegible in parts, there were many cancellations, and it's chock-full of typos. It also carried some profanity, but that was the most authentic way you could express yourself at those moments. It's messy, but it's the truth, as full as you've ever told it before. You finished writing this morning. As you sipped your fourth coffee, you hope that writing this story will help you.

In line with Freud's idea that 'artistic activity is essentially related to the secret gratification of infantile or forbidden wishes repressed in the unconsciousness' (Ihueze, 2019, p.4), the narrator sublimates her pain and frustrations into literary activity, helping her initiate her healing process. Instead of directly acting out difficult emotions in a harmful or socially unacceptable way with the id in control, she channels this energy into a creative activity with the ego in control.

4. Conclusion

Garricks uses song titles to assemble stories that are interconnected in terms of their thematic thrust but with different characters, narrators, and told from different points of view. These stories emphasise the worth of love and further depict the antics developed by people in relationships, whether familial, filial, platonic or erotic, to

maintain the upper hand in terms of power dynamics. Some characters resort to domestic violence while some use emotional blackmail like Victor. These attempts at wielding control over the other in relationships have snowballed into pain which some characters are made to deal with from the beginning to the end of the story. The author deftly calls for a change in attitude where lovers excise manipulative acts in love affairs and love wholeheartedly, for only then can a broken people's playlist metamorphose into a healed/happy people's playlist. Garricks mostly writes about love and pain in a way that guarantees each other. That is, where there is no love, there may be no pain. For instance, the trope of the love triangle which accommodates both love and pain within the same story exists because the characters, out of their jealous love, are hurt. Also, Sira is devastated by Kaodini's death and the pain is so excruciating that she wishes love itself had never been born. This follows from the fact that if she had no love for Kaodini, his demise would not have been painful. Thus, contrary to the belief that genuine love does not hurt, the presence of love does not equate the absence of pain in Garricks's text, as both go together even in the truest and purest form of love.

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